Proposing a New Foundation of Attack Trees in Monoidal Categories

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Abstract. This short paper introduces a new project studying at the intersection of threat analysis using attack trees and interactive theorem proving using linear logic. The project proposes a new semantics of attack trees in dialectica spaces, a well-known model of intuitionistic linear logic, which offers two new branching operators to attack trees. Then by exploiting – and extending – the Curry-Howard-Lambek correspondence seeks to develop a domain-specific linear functional programming language called Lina – for Linear Threat Analysis – for specifying and reasoning about attack trees.

1   Introduction

What do propositional logic, multisets, directed acyclic graphs, source sink graphs (or parallel-series pomsets), Petri nets, and Markov processes all have in common? They are all mathematical models of attack trees – see the references in [10,9] – but also, they can all be modeled in some form of a symmetric monoidal category[1] [17,2,5,6] – for the definition of a symmetric monoidal category see Appendix A. Taking things a little bit further, monoidal categories have a tight correspondence with linear logic through the beautiful Curry-Howard-Lambek correspondence [1]. This correspondence states that objects of a monoidal category correspond to the formulas of linear logic and the morphisms correspond to proofs of valid sequents of the logic. I propose that attack trees – in many different flavors – be modeled as objects in monoidal categories, and hence, as formulas of linear logic.

The Curry-Howard-Lambek correspondence is a three way relationship:

Categories	$\Longleftrightarrow$	Logic	$\Longleftrightarrow$	Functional Programming
Objects	$\Longleftrightarrow$	Formulas	$\Longleftrightarrow$	Types
Morphisms	$\Longleftrightarrow$	Proofs	$\Longleftrightarrow$	Programs

By modeling attack trees in monoidal categories we obtain a sound mathematical model, a logic for reasoning about attack trees, and the means of constructing a functional programming language for defining attack trees (as types), and constructing semantically valid transformations (as programs) of attack trees. Keep in mind that as stated "semantically valid transformations as programs"

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[1] I provide a proof that the category of source sink graphs is monoidal in Appendix B.

is very broad, because this may turn out to be something other than morphisms between attack trees, e.g. it may turn out to be bi-simulation between processes instead.

Linear logic was first proposed by Girard [7] and was quickly realized to be a theory of resources. In linear logic, every hypothesis must be used exactly once. Thus, formulas like $A \otimes A$ and A are not logically equivalent – here $\otimes$ is linear conjunction. This resource perspective of linear logic has been very fruitful in computer science. It has lead to linear logic as being a logical foundation of concurrency where formulas may be considered as processes. This perspective fits modeling attack trees perfectly, because they essentially correspond to concurrent processes. Connecting attack trees to processes has been done before where they have been modeled by event-based models of concurrency like Petri nets and partially-ordered multisets (pomsets) [9,11]. In fact, pomsets is a model in which events (the resources) can be executed exactly once, and thus, has a relationship with linear logic [15]. However, connecting linear logic as a theory of attack trees is novel.

Girard's genius behind linear logic was that he isolated the structural rules – weakening and contraction – by treating them as an effect and putting them inside a comonad called the of-course exponential denoted $!A$. In fact, $!A \otimes !A$ is logically equivalent to $!A$, and thus, by staying in the comonad we become propositional. This implies that a modal of attack trees in linear logic also provides a model of attack trees in propositional logic, and a combination of the two. It is possible to have the best of both worlds.

In this short paper I introduce a newly funded research project[2] investigating founding attack trees in monoidal categories, and through the Curry-Howard-Lambek correspondence deriving a new domain-specific functional programming language called Lina for Linear Threat Analysis. I begin by defining an extension of the attack trees given in [9] in Section 2. Then I introduce a new semantics of attack trees in dialectica spaces, which is also a model of full intuitionistic linear logic, in Section 3. The final section, Section 4, discusses Lina and some of the current problems the project seeks to answer.

2 Attack Trees

In this paper I consider an extension of attack trees with sequential composition which are due to Jhawar et al. [9], but one of our ultimate goals is to extend attack trees with even more operators driven by are choice of semantics. The syntax for attack trees is defined in the following definition.

Definition 1. *The following defines the syntax of **Attack Trees** given a set of base attacks $b \in \mathsf{B}$:*

$$t ::= b \mid t_1 + t_2 \mid t_1 \sqcup t_2 \mid t_1; t_2 \mid t_1 \otimes t_2 \mid \text{\textcircled{c}}t$$

I denote parallel composition by $t_1 + t_2$, choice between attacks by $t_1 \sqcup t_2$, sequential composition of attacks by $t_1 ; t_2$, and two new operators called orthocurrence, denoted $t_1 \otimes t_2$, and copy, denoted $\copyright t$.

The following rules define the attack tree reduction relation:

$$\frac{}{(t_1 \ \mathsf{op} \ t_2) \ \mathsf{op} \ t_3 \rightsquigarrow t_1 \ \mathsf{op}(t_2 \ \mathsf{op} \ t_3)} \ \text{ASSOC} \qquad \frac{}{t_1 \ \mathsf{op_S} \ t_2 \rightsquigarrow t_2 \ \mathsf{op_S} \ t_1} \ \text{SYM}$$

$$\frac{}{t \sqcup t \rightsquigarrow t} \ \text{CHOICE} \qquad \frac{}{\copyright t \otimes \copyright t \rightsquigarrow \copyright t} \ \text{COPY}$$

$$\frac{}{(t_1 \sqcup t_2) + t \rightsquigarrow (t_1 + t) \sqcup (t_2 + t)} \ \text{DIST}_1 \qquad \frac{}{(t_1 \sqcup t_2); t \rightsquigarrow (t_1; t) \sqcup (t_2; t)} \ \text{DIST}_2$$

where $\mathsf{op} \in \{+, \otimes, ;, \sqcup\}$ and $\mathsf{op_S} \in \{+, \otimes, \sqcup\}$. The previous rules can be applied on any well-formed subattack tree, and can be straightforwardly extended into an equivalence relation.

The syntax given in the previous definition differs from the syntax used by Jhawar et al. [9]. First, I use infix binary operations, while they use prefix n-ary operations. However, it does not sacrifice any expressivity, because each operation is associative, and parallel composition, choice, and orthocurrence are symmetric. Thus, Jhawar et al.'s definition of attack trees can be embedded into the ones defined here.

The second major difference is that I denote parallel composition with an operator that implies we can think of it as a disjunction, but Jhawar et al. and others in the literature seem to use an operator that implies that we can think of it as a conjunction. The semantics, however, tells us that it is really a disjunction. The parallel operation defined on source sink graphs defined by Jhawar et al. [9] can be proven to be a coproduct – see Appendix B – and coproducts categorically model disjunctions. Furthermore, parallel composition is modeled by multiset union in the multiset semantics, but we can model this as a coproduct. Lastly, the semantics I give in the next section models parallel composition as a coproduct. Thus, I claim that an operator that reflects this is for the better.

The third difference is that I denote the choice between executing attack t_1 or attack t_2, but not both, by $t_1 \sqcup t_2$ instead of using a symbol that implies that it is a disjunction. This fits very nicely with the semantics of Jhawar et al., where they collect the attacks that can be executed into a set. The semantics I given in the next section models choice directly.

The forth, and final, difference is that I extend the syntax with two new operators called orthocurrence and copy. The attack $t_1 \otimes t_2$ states that t_1 interacts with the attack t_2 in the sense that processes interact. Modeling interacting attacks allows for the more refined modeling of security critical systems, for example, it can be used to bring social engineering into the analysis where someone communicates malicious information or commands to a unsuspecting party. As a second example, one could take over a workstation on a network and funnel malicious traffic through it onto the internal network. Orthocurrence stems from process algebra, and for more examples, and a brief history of orthocurrence see

[14]. I conjecture that it should be possible to extend Jhawar et al.'s model of attack trees to include orthocurrence due to the relationship their model has with pomsets which is where orthocurrence actually originated.

The attack $\copyright t$ indicates that attack t can be copied and contracted. For example, $\copyright t \otimes \copyright t$ is equivalent to $\copyright t$. Thus, the attack trees given here can treat attack trees as processes/resources that cannot be freely copied and deleted, as propositions that can be, and as a mixture of the two. Semantically, $\copyright t$ is equivalent to the of-course exponential from linear logic mentioned in the introduction.

The reduction rules are a slightly extended version of equivalences given in Jhaware et al. [9] – Theorem 1. The main difference is the COPY rule which allows copies made by the copy operator to be contracted.

3   Semantics of Attack Trees in Dialectica Spaces

I now introduce a new semantics of attack trees that connects their study with a new perspective of attack trees that could highly impact future research in attack trees: intuitionistic linear logic, but it also strengthens their connection to process calculi. Note this section, with the exception of sequential composition, has been formalized in the proof assistant Agda[3]. The semantics is based on the notion of a dialectica space:

Definition 2. *A **dialectica space** is a triple (A, Q, δ) where A and Q are sets and $\delta : A \times Q \to 2$ is a relation.*

Dialectica spaces can be seen as the intuitionistic cousin [4] of Chu spaces [13]. The latter have be used extensively to study process algebra and as a model of classical linear logic, while dialectica spaces and their morphisms form one a categorical model of intuitionistic linear logic called $\mathsf{Dial}_2(\mathsf{Sets})$ (originally due to de Paiva [3]); I do not introduce dialectica space morphisms here, but the curious reader can find the definition in the formal development. I will use the intuitions often used when explaining Chu spaces to explain dialectica spaces, but it should be known that these intuitions are due to Pratt and Gupta [8]. However, verifying that the Chu space construction of choice and sequential composition works in dialectica spaces is novel and so is the application of this semantics to attack trees.

Intuitively, a dialectica space, (A, Q, δ), can be thought of as a process where A is the set of actions the process will execute, Q is the set of states the process can enter, and for $a \in A$ and $q \in Q$, $\delta(a, q)$ indicates whether action a can be executed in state q.

The interpretation of attack trees into dialectica spaces, each definition is equivalent to the construction on Chu spaces [8], requires the construction of each operation on dialectica spaces:

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[3] The complete formalization can be found at `https://github.com/heades/dialectica-spaces` which is part of a general library for working with dialectica spaces in Agda developed with Valeria de Paiva.

Parallel Composition. Suppose $\mathcal{A} = (A, Q, \alpha)$ and $\mathcal{B} = (B, R, \beta)$ are two dialectica spaces. Then we can construct the (coproduct) dialectica space $\mathcal{A} + \mathcal{B} = (A + B, Q \times R, \alpha + \beta)$ where $A + B$ is the disjoint union of A and B, and $(\alpha + \beta)(i, x) = \alpha(i, x)$ if $i \in A$, but $(\alpha + \beta)(i, x) = \beta(i, x)$ if $i \in B$. Thus, from a process perspective we can see that $\mathcal{A} + \mathcal{B}$ executes either an action of $\mathcal{A}$ or an action of $\mathcal{B}$, but also potentially both.

Choice. Suppose $\mathcal{A} = (A, Q, \alpha)$ and $\mathcal{B} = (B, R, \beta)$ are two dialectica spaces. Then we can construct the dialectica space $\mathcal{A} \sqcup \mathcal{B} = (A + B, Q + R, \alpha \sqcup \beta)$ where $(\alpha \sqcup \beta)(i, j) = \alpha(i, j)$ if $i \in A$ and $j \in Q$, $(\alpha + \beta)(i, j) = \beta(i, j)$ if $i \in B$ and $j \in R$, otherwise $(\alpha + \beta)(i, j) = 0$. Thus, from a process perspective we can see that $\mathcal{A} \sqcup \mathcal{B}$ executes either an action of $\mathcal{A}$ or an action of $\mathcal{B}$, but not both. Since the actions and states of $\mathcal{A} \sqcup \mathcal{B}$ are disjoint unions it is pretty easy to show that choice is symmetric and associative, but it is not a coproduct, because it is not possible to define the corresponding injections.

Sequential Composition. Suppose we extend dialectic space with the ability to determine which states of the space are initial and which are final. Let $\mathcal{A} = (A, Q, \alpha)$ and $\mathcal{B} = (B, R, \beta)$ be two dialectica spaces. Then we can construct the dialectica space $\mathcal{A}; \mathcal{B} = (A + B, Z, \alpha; \beta)$ where $Z = \{(q_1, q_2) \in Q \times R \mid q_1 \text{ is final in } \mathcal{A} \text{ or } q_2 \text{ is initial in } \mathcal{B}\}$, and $(\alpha; \beta)(i, (q, r)) = \alpha(i, q)$ if $i \in A$, $(\alpha; \beta)(i, (q, r)) = \beta(i, r)$ if $i \in B$. Thus, from a process perspective we can see that $\mathcal{A}; \mathcal{B}$ will first execute the actions of $\mathcal{A}$ and then once in a final state it will begin executing actions of $\mathcal{B}$. It can be shown that sequential composition is a non-symmetric associative operation.

Orthocurrence. Suppose $\mathcal{A} = (A, Q, \alpha)$ and $\mathcal{B} = (B, R, \beta)$ are two dialectica spaces. Then we can construct the dialectica space $\mathcal{A} \otimes \mathcal{B} = (A \times B, (B \to Q) \times (A \to R), \alpha \otimes \beta)$ where $B \to Q$ and $A \to R$ denote function spaces, and $(\alpha \otimes \beta)((a, b), (f, g)) = \alpha(a, f(b)) \wedge \beta(b, g(a))$. From a process perspective the actions of $\mathcal{A} \otimes \mathcal{B}$ are actions from $\mathcal{A}$ and actions of $\mathcal{B}$, but the states are are pairs of maps $f : B \to Q$ and $g : A \to R$ from actions to states. This is the point of interaction between the processes. It is possible to show that orthocurrence is a symmetric monoidal bi-functor which is associative, and has an identity, but for the details see the formal development.

Copying. Suppose $\mathcal{A} = (A, Q, \alpha)$ is a dialectica space. Then $\copyright \mathcal{A} = (A, A \to Q^*, \alpha^*)$ where Q^* denotes the free monoid with carrier Q and α^* is the free monoid extension of α. Copying defines a comonad $\copyright : \mathsf{Dial}_2(\mathsf{Sets}) \to \mathsf{Dial}_2(\mathsf{Sets})$ on the category of dialectica spaces, and thus, we have dialectica morphisms $\varepsilon : \copyright A \to A$ and $\delta : \copyright A \to \copyright \copyright A$ satisfying the usual diagrams. Furthermore, it has enough structure to show the isomorphism $(\copyright \mathcal{A} \otimes \copyright \mathcal{A}) \cong \copyright \mathcal{A}$. This implies that under $\copyright$ we escape to propositional logic.

At this point it is straightforward to define an interpretation $[\![t]\!]$ of attack trees into $\mathsf{Dial}_2(\mathsf{Sets})$. Soundness with respect to this model would correspond to if $t_1 \rightsquigarrow t_2$, then $[\![t_1]\!] \cong [\![t_2]\!]$ where the latter takes place in $\mathsf{Dial}_2(\mathsf{Sets})$ for some suitable equivalence $\cong$ between objects. Naturally, one might choose isomorphism, but this does not hold, because the reduction rules COPY, DIST$_1$, and DIST$_2$ do not hold up to isomorphism of objects, but I conjecture if we take $\cong$ to be bi-simulation as defined for Chu spaces – see p. 63 of Gupta [8] – then we obtain the proper equivalences.

This semantics can be seen as a generalization of some existing models. Multisets, pomsets, and Petri nets can all be modeled by dialectica spaces [2,8]. However, there is a direct connection between dialectica spaces and linear logic which may lead to a logical theory of attack trees.

4 Lina: A Domain Specific PL for Threat Analysis

The second major part of this project is the development of a staticly-typed polymorphic domain-specific linear functional programming language for specifying and reasoning about attack trees called Lina for Linear Threat Analysis. Lina will consist of a core language and a surface language. The core language will include a decidable type checker using term annotations on types. Programming with annotations can be very cumbersome, and so the surface language will use local type inference [12] to alleviate some of the burden from annotations. However, the surface language will provide further conveniences in the form of automation, to be used with labeled attack trees, and graphical representations of attack trees based on the various graphical languages used in category theory [16]. Thus, the security specialist will not be required to program directly in Lina, but instead will use a graphical interface to construct attack trees and prove properties about them.

There are two main questions that still must be answered in order for all this to work. First, linear logic generally does not include operators like choice and sequential composition, and hence, in order to build Lina we must figure out how to add these operators to linear logic. The answer to this questions requires an answer to **how to add in addition to the commutative operators already in intuitionistic linear logic a new non-commutative monoidal operator for sequential conjunction?** This is a non-trivial addition. It seems the it has been done in classical linear logic [15], but it remains to be seen if it can be done in intuitionistic linear logic. I conjecture that choice should be straightforward to add as a new symmetric monoidal operator.

Second, generally in the Curry-Howard-Lambek correspondence programs are seen as proofs/dialectica space morphisms, but we know that the morphisms of $\mathsf{Dial}_2(\mathsf{Sets})$ do not capture all of the structure of the attack trees, and hence, we must move to bi-simulation of dialectica spaces to obtain a sound model of attack trees. So one important question we must answer is **do all isomorphisms between dialectica spaces in** $\mathsf{Dial}_2(\mathsf{Sets})$ **lift to equivalences using bi-simulation?** If yes, then we may consider programs as bi-simulations, and hence, obtain the proper structure to soundly model attack trees.

5 Conclusion

The project described here is to first develop the semantics of attack trees (Section 2) in dialectica spaces (Section 3), a model of full intuitionistic linear logic, and then exploiting – and extending – the Curry-Howard-Lambek correspondence to develop a new functional programming language called Lina (Section 4) to be used to develop a new tool to conduct threat analysis using attack trees. This tool will include the ability to design and formally reason about attack trees using interactive theorem proving.

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A Symmetric Monoidal Categories

This appendix provides the definitions of both categories in general, and, in particular, symmetric monoidal closed categories. We begin with the definition of a category:

Definition 3. *A **category**, $\mathcal{C}$, consists of the following data:*

- *A set of objects $\mathcal{C}_0$, each denoted by A, B, C, etc.*
- *A set of morphisms $\mathcal{C}_1$, each denoted by f, g, h, etc.*
- *Two functions src, the source of a morphism, and tar, the target of a morphism, from morphisms to objects. If $\mathsf{src}(f) = A$ and $\mathsf{tar}(f) = B$, then we write $f : A \to B$.*
- *Given two morphisms $f : A \to B$ and $g : B \to C$, then the morphism $f; g : A \to C$, called the composition of f and g, must exist.*
- *For every object $A \in \mathcal{C}_0$, the there must exist a morphism $\mathsf{id}_A : A \to A$ called the identity morphism on A.*
- *The following axioms must hold:*
  - *(Identities) For any $f : A \to B$, $f; \mathsf{id}_B = f = \mathsf{id}_A; f$.*
  - *(Associativity) For any $f : A \to B$, $g : B \to C$, and $h : C \to D$, $(f; g); h = f; (g; h)$.*

Categories are by definition very abstract, and it is due to this that makes them so applicable. The usual example of a category is the category whose objects are all sets, and whose morphisms are set-theoretic functions. Clearly, composition and identities exist, and satisfy the axioms of a category. A second example is preordered sets, $(A, \leq)$, where the objects are elements of A and a morphism $f : a \to b$ for elements $a, b \in A$ exists iff $a \leq b$. Reflexivity yields identities, and transitivity yields composition.

Symmetric monoidal categories pair categories with a commutative monoid like structure called the tensor product.

Definition 4. *A **symmetric monoidal category (SMC)** is a category, $\mathcal{M}$, with the following data:*

- *An object I of $\mathcal{M}$,*
- *A bi-functor $\otimes : \mathcal{M} \times \mathcal{M} \to \mathcal{M}$,*
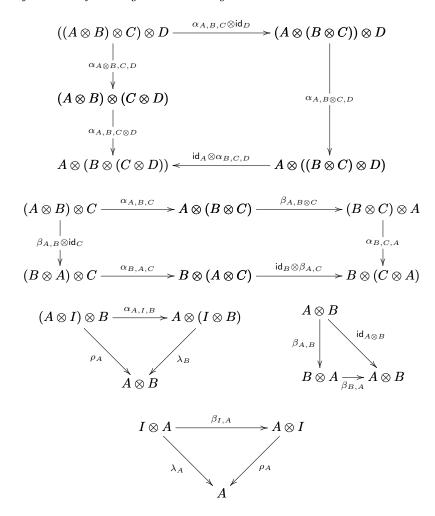- *The following natural isomorphisms:*

$$\lambda_A : I \otimes A \to A$$
$$\rho_A : A \otimes I \to A$$
$$\alpha_{A,B,C} : (A \otimes B) \otimes C \to A \otimes (B \otimes C)$$

- *A symmetry natural transformation:*

$$\beta_{A,B} : A \otimes B \to B \otimes A$$

– *Subject to the following coherence diagrams:*

$$((A \otimes B) \otimes C) \otimes D \xrightarrow{\ \alpha_{A,B,C} \otimes \mathsf{id}_D\ } (A \otimes (B \otimes C)) \otimes D$$

$$\downarrow \alpha_{A \otimes B, C, D} \qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad \downarrow \alpha_{A, B \otimes C, D}$$

$$(A \otimes B) \otimes (C \otimes D)$$

$$\downarrow \alpha_{A, B, C \otimes D}$$

$$A \otimes (B \otimes (C \otimes D)) \xleftarrow{\ \mathsf{id}_A \otimes \alpha_{B,C,D}\ } A \otimes ((B \otimes C) \otimes D)$$

$$(A \otimes B) \otimes C \xrightarrow{\ \alpha_{A,B,C}\ } A \otimes (B \otimes C) \xrightarrow{\ \beta_{A, B \otimes C}\ } (B \otimes C) \otimes A$$

$$\downarrow \beta_{A,B} \otimes \mathsf{id}_C \qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad \downarrow \alpha_{B,C,A}$$

$$(B \otimes A) \otimes C \xrightarrow{\ \alpha_{B,A,C}\ } B \otimes (A \otimes C) \xrightarrow{\ \mathsf{id}_B \otimes \beta_{A,C}\ } B \otimes (C \otimes A)$$

$$(A \otimes I) \otimes B \xrightarrow{\ \alpha_{A,I,B}\ } A \otimes (I \otimes B) \qquad\qquad A \otimes B$$

$$\rho_A \searrow \qquad \swarrow \lambda_B \qquad\qquad \beta_{A,B} \downarrow \qquad \searrow \mathsf{id}_{A \otimes B}$$

$$A \otimes B \qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad B \otimes A \xrightarrow{\ \beta_{B,A}\ } A \otimes B$$

$$I \otimes A \xrightarrow{\ \beta_{I,A}\ } A \otimes I$$

$$\lambda_A \searrow \qquad \swarrow \rho_A$$

$$A$$

B   Source Sink Graphs are Symmetric Monoidal